TL769

ON THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN EAST TIMOR

Eukumindo document

Unofficial translation from the German by CIIR: Main text summarised. Passages in '' are literal translations. III (Conclusions) in full. Section numbers from the original.
21 Jan 1988

The discussion on human rights violations in Indonesian East Timor continues.

Eukumindo is concerned as the European Working Group for Ecumenical Relations with Indonesia to participate in this discussion with the European missionary societies which have contacts with the member churches of the Community of Churches in Indonesia (PGI, formerly the Council of Churches in Indonesia, DGI).

East Timor has been a topic of discussion between the PGI and the Indonesian government over many years. Eukumindo and its Indonesian partners are anxious for an improvement of the situation.

On the other hand, Eukumindo feels that the discussion suffers from:

a) neglect of certain facts;
b) partial presentation of others, without examination of the interests involved;
c) hasty parallels with other world religions where human rights violations are frequent, resulting from inadequate knowledge of the Indonesian background.

Eukumindo intends this document as a contribution to a more accurate discussion.

I. Historical Summary

...'All three groups (FRETILIN, UDT and APODETI) receive support in East Timor from corresponding groups of the population:

> 'FRETILIN's base is many of the local intellectuals, whose ideas are at first more nationalist than left-wing revolutionary, but under the influence of radically minded Portuguese officers, who combine in Jan 1975 to form the 'Timorese sergeants' committee', increasingly become convinced communist revolutionaries.

'The UDT is supported by church circles, for whom atheistic communist doctrine is unacceptable.

'APODETI is supported by the rural population where the ethnic-cultural connection with West Timor is most felt. APODETI is perhaps the least well organised.

'The efforts of the three groups to win the population for their goals rapidly lead to violent clashes. In the process FRETILIN and UDT temporarily form a coalition against APODETI, and the head of the Atsabe, Batumanu, is arrested. He is tortured in prison and APODETI complains to the UN.'

'23 August 1975.	Portugal asks Indonesia to help Portuguese nationals to leave the territory.
'25 August 1975.	Australia makes a similar request. Indonesia agrees.
	As a result about 50 000 refugees arrive in Indonesia from East Timor. Severe measures by FRETILIN to prevent mass flight.
'September/October 1985	The leaderships of UDT and APODETI move to Indonesia and begin a counter-offensive with volunteers, who recapture Atsabe and Batugade.'

November 1985. FRETILIN's declaration of independence is rejected by Indonesia and Australia. The leaderships of UDT and APODETI (and of two smaller parties) proclaim the integration of East Timor into the Republic of Indonesia. the Indonesian parliament petitions the government to end the civil war in East Timor. The Indonesian army (or a 'Volunteer Indonesian Army') invades on 7 December but meets unexpectedly strong resistance. Not until 29 December are the larger towns, the enclave of Oecusse-Ambeno, and the island of Atauro in Indonesian hands.

The war continues as a guerrilla war. Lack of medical care and the failure of harvests as a result of warfare lead to scarcely conceivable suffering and death among the East Timorese. FRETILIN regroups. In operations in April-June 1981 the Indonesian army engages in blanket bombing and misuses civilians

as a 'shield' for advancing troops.

The territory is not pacified. The last known operation by Indonesian forces is Operation Kikis of 1986.

Since 1979, and especially since 1983, the Indonesian government has made great efforts to develop East Timor, doing more in a few years than the Portuguese did in 400 years.

Nevertheless ET is isolated. The Indonesian government allows few visitors.

II. Assessment of events

A. Charges against Indonesia and replies
   a) the Indonesian intervention, and the militaristic nature of Indonesian society
   b) Subsequent Indonesian policy in ET: physical and cultural genocide.

B. EUKUMINDO argues that the number of deaths has been exaggerated, and that Indonesia is not a military dictatorship; the army enjoys popular affection because of its role in Indonesia's independence struggle. Transmigration is simple meeting a desperate need in Indonesia. the only way in which ET is singled out is by the settling of Christian transmigrants. And the development progress since 1979 is striking.

C. Particular features of the Indonesian context

1) Stability, achieved against great odds amidst great diversity, notably as a result of the common experience of the anti-colonial struggle.
   The role of Pancasila is important; it cannot be dismissed as mere words.

2) The role of the military (also committed to Pancasila). NB the function of the military as the 'school of the nation', and the role of retired officers in the public service.

3) The importance of the national language: it is significant that Sukarno did not impose Javanese.

Familiarity with the Indonesian context makes many things intelligible. 'When Indonesia decided to make ET the 27th province of Indonesia, both government and people acted on the erroneous assumption that the ETimorese would accept with enthusiasm what was dear and precious to them: Pancasila, the national language and their army of freedom fighters.

'That this enthusiasm had grown out of a common historical

experience and without it was not possible, was realised by almost no-one, and this led to disappointments and enormous communications barriers.

'The charge of "cultural genocide", for example, which Indonesian is said to be perpetrating against ETimorese by introducing the Indonesian language, is incomprehensible to Indonesians. In this connection Indonesians point to the cultural alienation of ET by the Portuguese, as shown by the 'Latinisation' of almost all names and the fact that none of the local languages of ET became the standard, but Portuguese remained the official language.'

...For the Indonesians it is particularly hard, in fact intolerable, that all the blame is cast on them, while Portugal remains uncriticised.

'In the Indonesian view, a solution to the conflict in ET must include, not just an end to hostilities and the winning over of the ETimorese, but also a reconciliation with Portugal, by which Indonesia feels unjustly treated.'

4) Because of the deep-rooted anti-communism of Indonesians at all levels of society (despite the past importance of the Indonesian Communist Party), Indonesians can interpret the bitter resistance of FRETILIN as nothing other than manipulation by outside forces which are not interested in the liberation of ET.

...'In support of the honesty of the Indonesian leadership's claim that it had no territorial interest in ET is the fact that it did not intervene until a popular republic was established in its archipelago which everyone knew to be incapable of surviving alone, but only with outside help. Where that help would come from is easy to imagine.'

5) Parallels are drawn between the anti-communism of Indonesia and that of the Reagan administration and the South African government, but there are important differences. The Indonesian government enjoys popular affection as a result of the liberation struggle, and is making efforts to develop ET.

6) 'None of this, however, belies the fact that there are human rights abuses in ET. It continues to be a territory in a constant state of war, and no war is without violations of human rights. The bitterness with which the struggle was waged on both sides, and to some extent continues to be waged, and the efforts of the Indonesian government to maintain secrecy, lead people to suspect the worst.

'An army whose pride has been injured is probably always in danger of over-reacting.

'In ET it is possibly too little subject to public scrutiny, and

therefore becoming a law unto itself. This, at least, is the implication of th continuing reports of events in ET.

7) 'Moreover, the main difficulty in this whole problem is that the only reports which reach us are biased in one direction or another. While the fact that FRETILIN has its own international representation at the UN is welcome, equally it cannot be expected that its reports are always objective.

'For example, it is well known that former FRETILIN members, who have subsequently gone into exile, have great influence with 'Amnesty International' and similar organisations. It is at least plausible to assume that they describe th conflict from their point of view and that they themselves simply do not notice new developments in ET.

'Even the reports which come via the Catholic Church cannot in our opinion be accepted without question. During Portuguese rule the Catholic Church occupied a position of very considerable power, and during this period never supported those without rights and the poor. Since ET has become the 27th province of Indonesia, the Catholic Church has lost its predominance. It is at least conceivable that under these circumstances it sometimes sees the resistance groups as its natural allies.

'The Protestant Church in ET is very small. In practice it has been able to develop only since 1976. Nonetheless the DGI (later the PGI) has in many discussions with the government argued for respect for human rights in ET. Since 1980 ET has been part of the PGI's development programme. In various publications of human rights groups the PGI leadership is accused of being over-loyal to the Indonesian government, partly from a desire to avoid open conflict and partly out of nervousness about the Moslem majority in the country, which is demanding harsh measures against the resistance in ET. The PGI leadership itself rejects these charges. It is convinced that much of the anti-Indonesian propaganda abroad does not stand up. It argues further that the cultural context of Indonesia requires that one does not make one's partner in dialogue 'lose face' if one seriously wishes to achieve something.

III. Conclusions

In the difficult situation of East Timor - in many ways tragic and politically very complex - it cannot be for EUKUMINDO or similar organisations to produce suggestions, let alone demands, for the necessary measures. The indigenous churches can do this, but even for them it is difficult.

Nevertheless EUKUMINDO can express pleas which have a chance of

being considered in the future reflections of those whose role is to take the decisions. EUKUMINDO welcomes any political step which contributes to an improvement of the situation of people in East Timor. This is the sense in which the following points are to be understood:

1. We are concerned at the fact that so little reliable information exists about East Timor. We therefore request better facilities for visits to East Timor by international journalists, church representatives and representatives of international relief organisations.

2. We are disturbed by reports that sections of East Timor's population continue to suffer lack of food and medical care, particularly in remote areas and conflict zones. We therefore ask that organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Parpem PGI and similar bodies are enabled to provide relief in these areas also, and that no political conditions should be attached to this relief.

3. We are disturbed by reports of human rights violations against East Timorese, of torture, broken promises of amnesty, etc. Such stances are against the declared will of the Indonesian government. We therefore ask that ICRC representatives should be given free access to all prisons in which political prisoners are held.

4. We are anxious that all possibilities should be exhausted in order to attain a solution for East Timor which is acceptable to all sides, so that the armed conflicts and the fear of lawlessness may cease.

5. EUKUMINDO is prepared, within the limit of its capacities, to cooperate with all concerned, particularly with all church organisations, to collaborate in the resolution of disputed issues and to press for the provision of the necessary material assistance.

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10.12.1987